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Boating fun starts with boating safe

By Sen. Michelle McManus

With hot weather right around the corner, there's no better place to spend a Michigan summer than on the water. But before you take to the waves for fun and adventure, please remember - boating and alcohol don't mix.

Alcohol was involved in 32 percent of all reported boating fatalities in the United States in 2004. That is a loss of life both tragic and preventable. U.S. Coast Guard statistics indicate that boat operators with a blood alcohol concentration above .10 percent are 10 times more likely to be killed in a boating accident than boaters with no alcohol in their system.

Many boaters don't realize alcohol can be even more hazardous on water than on land. As when driving a vehicle, alcohol impairs judgment, reaction time, balance and vision. Out on the water, though, environmental factors such as sun, wind and motion can magnify the effects of alcohol and accelerate a drinker's impairment. Boats and personal watercraft can be trickier to handle when stopping and turning, making even minimal alcohol consumption a concern.

The misuse of alcohol is not only dangerous, it's illegal. Michigan law prohibits anyone from boating while under the influence of alcohol or drugs and provides stiff penalties. Boaters should know that by virtue of operating a boat on Michigan waters they have consented to be tested for alcohol or drugs if arrested.

Boating fun starts with boating sober and boating smart. For up-to-date information on Michigan boating regulations, visit www.michigan.gov/dnr to access the Handbook of Michigan Boating Laws and Responsibilities.

My door is always open. If you have questions on this or any other state matter, please do not hesitate to contact my office. You can call toll free at 866-305-2135 or contact my district office at 231-775-8599. You also can reach me online at www.senate.michigan.gov/mcmanus.